



GETTING GRANTS:
**THE COMPLETE MANUAL OF PROPOSAL
DEVELOPMENT AND ADMINISTRATION**

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1

THEY JUST DON'T GET IT, DO THEY? ASSESSING ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY TO PURSUE GRANT FUNDS

I have been employed in the business of writing grants — or, more specifically, developing and administering grants — for more than five years now as the sole employee in the grants office of an urban community college, the fifth largest in the state. I coordinate the grant-writing activities of more than 750 full- and part-time faculty and staff serving more than 28,000 students and other individuals each year. Before I took this job, I'd had about five years of public-sector work experience, which included working with grant programs and writing grants from time to time. I found grants work interesting, and I enjoyed it.

When I accepted my current job in 2000, I thought to myself, "I like to write. I like to organize and coordinate. I am a good administrator and have an eye for detail. Working with grants will be the perfect job for me! I'll be able to help the college's faculty and staff find and secure funding for their programs, which in turn will help students. It shouldn't be very stressful. I'll be doing rewarding work. And I can do it ... after all, it isn't rocket science!"

Today, I still don't feel that grant writing is rocket science, though that's not to say I think it's easy. However, over these past five years I have been struck by how the profession is viewed by people on the outside — whether they have little knowledge of the process and what I do or have had some experience, even if it's transient, with proposal preparation and development, but don't engage in it every single day.

When I meet with colleagues from other colleges, we agree that "they just don't get it, do they?" We compare notes on faculty who insist on applying to organizations such as the National Science Foundation for highly competitive and complex grants, basing their proposals on last-minute, ill-conceived ideas, focusing on the number of dollars they can get instead of the real need for a program to exist at their institution. When I spoke to the board of directors of a statewide professional association about how my colleagues and I could provide technical assistance for the association's grant-writing members, I found myself at a loss for words when one of the

directors of a member agency declared, “You can’t help us. We just lock ourselves away for three days before the grant is due. That’s the only way to do it. Just lock yourself away!” They just don’t get it, do they?

Two camps emerge: Those who feel that grants are hard work with hard-to-understand rules — hard to write, hard to get funded, and, once funded, hard to administer — and those who think that writing a grant is easy — people get tons of money for all kinds of reasons, the government and foundations are giving away free grant money all the time, and it only takes a matter of days or (worse still) hours to throw together a grant application. The first camp is composed primarily of people who have minimal knowledge of grant activity; they may believe that dealing with grants is more trouble than it is worth, and they generally tend to shy away from grant writing. Members of the second camp are more likely to have worked in or near grant programs in the past. They think that their poorly thought-out, hastily thrown together proposal will succeed in obtaining funding, and they will apply for any source of funding that comes down the pike, based on their belief that they have a “really neat idea that deserves funding.”

In reality, grantsmanship is both a science and an art. It is hard work, but gets easier with practice, good planning, and organization. When you need funds for your organization or project, a funded proposal is rarely more trouble than it’s worth. Grant proposals often start out as “really neat ideas,” but successful proposals are neat ideas that became well-developed, rational plans matching the needs of the organization seeking funding with the requirements of the funding source.

Is it just people on the outside — people who don’t write grants, administer grant-funded programs, nor work with grants — who don’t get it, or do insiders have some problems as well? In my experience there is enough “blame” to spread around. From novices to seasoned professionals, we all have room to expand our knowledge of the grants landscape. We can all adjust our thinking about grants; our perceptions and misperceptions; and our views about the place of grants in our organizations, the relationship between grant funding and the organization’s mission, and the way in which we approach the grants process before submission and after award.

I want everybody who is engaged in the process of proposal development and administration to “get it.” People who get it don’t write grants just because the money is available; they write grants because they have identified a need within their organization and/or community and have devised a program or project to address that need. The program or project fits within the funder’s guidelines and supports the mission of the organization seeking funding. People who get it do not have to lock themselves away for three days before a grant proposal is due. If you have a clearly defined process for responding to grant solicitations and a clear idea of your program’s design, not only can you submit a cohesive proposal that will receive funding, but you can do it without going missing for 72 hours while you desperately scribble out a grant proposal and pray that you’ll be funded.



Do not let grant dollars be the only factor driving your proposal development process. In other words, do not write a grant proposal just for the money.

1. SOME QUESTIONS AND DEFINITIONS

Do you have a grants process at your organization? Who is responsible for writing your organization's grant proposals? Who is responsible for managing grant-funded programs? Is it the same person who is responsible for administration and oversight of awarded grant funds? Do you view grant writing as a fundraising activity or a form of resource development? Is there a difference between the two? Do you differentiate between proposal development, grant writing, and grants administration? Does your organization need a fundraiser, a grant writer, or a grants administrator?

These are all important questions. They will come up in some form, sooner or later, for any organization, large or small, that wants to seriously pursue grant funding for its projects. You can address these questions proactively by analyzing your organization's needs. This will enable you to anticipate many of the issues that are bound to arise, as well as the potential problems. Or you can wait and address issues as problems develop. I urge you to choose the former approach. If you do not analyze your organization's needs and devise a clear plan of operation beforehand, the result will be, at best, failure to achieve your potential. At worst it can be disastrous.

1.1 What Is a Grant?

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, a grant is "something granted, *especially*: a gift (as of land or money) for a particular purpose." For our purposes, a grant is a monetary award given by a government agency, foundation, corporation, or other entity to another body in order to plan, implement,

or operate a particular program or fund a particular project.

1.2 What Is Fundraising?

The term "fundraising" covers a host of activities designed to solicit monetary donations for an organization, project, or cause. Simply put, to fundraise means to ask for money from individuals, corporations, and foundations. This can be accomplished through direct-mail solicitation (which includes requests for money made via postal mail, telephone, and e-mail), annual fundraising campaigns, major gift solicitations for major gifts and planned giving, capital campaigns (for major projects, such as construction or renovation of facilities), and special fundraising events.

Fundraisers often ask donors for unrestricted donations or gifts to help with a range of projects or to fund general operating expenses. This is how gifts and grants are different. Gifts can be restricted or unrestricted. Grants are always restricted. Gifts are flexible. Grants are not. Organizations must use grant money for the explicit purpose stated in the proposal and approved by the funder in the award notification. Grant awards are bound by a contractual obligation, reporting requirements, etc. Gifts are not.



Grants are not something for nothing. They are agreements between the funding source and the organization receiving the grant award. When an organization accepts a grant award, a contractual arrangement is created, which is both explicit and implied. The organization agrees to administer the program it has proposed, based on the interests of or needs identified by the funder in its request for proposals (RFP) or funding guidelines.

Depending on the needs and size of your organization, a single individual (usually with a job title such as “director of development” or “development officer”) may be able to handle all these fundraising activities. Larger organizations may need one or several people to support each activity, with separate directors for annual campaigns, major gifts, planned giving, and the capital campaign, not to mention a special events planner.

Soliciting grant funds is often included as part of an organization’s fundraising plan, but not always. Instead, an office of resource development (see section 1.3) may oversee grant proposals, or, because grant funds are usually used for a specific project, soliciting grants may fall under the jurisdiction of the person or department in charge of the specific project.

Fundraising campaigns that raise money for an organization’s general operation, rather than for a specific project, are less likely to receive grant funds. Most funders will not give to general fundraising campaigns or will not fund general operating expenses. They prefer to target a problem and give grants that address that problem.

1.3 What Is Resource Development?

Some individuals and organizations view resource development and fundraising as one and the same. Others view resource development as an altogether different activity from what I like to call pure fundraising, which is described in section 1.2.

People who work in cause-related or issue-related nonprofit and community-based organizations consider resource development to be the same as fundraising. It all involves asking for money, which often includes writing grant proposals to fund projects and programs that address the organization’s specific cause.

People who work in educational institutions, particularly in higher education, are more likely to see a difference between resource development and fundraising. Many universities and colleges have offices of resource development separate from their foundation offices, which they see as the fundraising arm of the organization. But if the resource development office doesn’t “raise funds,” then what does it do?

Well, that’s where grants come in. Those of my colleagues who consider themselves resource developers are actually what everyone else would call a grant writer. Writing grants may not be all that they do, but it forms the basis for everything else. The impetus to apply for a particular grant will come from within the resource development office. Resource development staff are in tune with the organization’s mission, vision, and strategic plan. They identify suitable grant competitions that align with the current and future goals of the organization, and they develop and write the grant proposals to support those goals. If the grant proposals are funded, the result is not just a pot of cash, but new resources, programs, and funding streams for the organization. Voilà — resource development!

1.4 What Is Proposal Development?

An organization may have a person on its fundraising or resource development staff who writes grant proposals in addition to other fundraising duties. If the organization writes enough grant proposals each year, it may have a dedicated staff person who only writes grant proposals.

However, whether you write the grant proposal or not, if you are involved in any way with planning, creating, or developing grant proposals within your organization, you are

part of the proposal development process. Development personnel and/or grant writers at nonprofit organizations develop proposals. Grants office personnel at colleges and universities, who may not consider themselves grant writers, more often than not assist in the proposal development process. Resource developers who do not fundraise but focus on securing grant funding for their organizations are most certainly doing proposal development. And all the other people who write grant proposals and seek grant funds for their programs — whether a pastor or parishioner at a church, a nonprofit staffer or volunteer, a K-12 principal or teacher — are engaged in proposal development. I'll discuss the process in detail in Chapter 3.

1.5 What Is Grants Administration?

Grants administration encompasses a variety of pre-award and post-award activities that involve monitoring grant proposals and grant-funded programs. Pre-award activities range from identifying funding sources, assessing the RFP and funder guidelines, and brainstorming project ideas, all the way to planning and developing programs and writing and submitting the proposal. Post-award activities include accepting the terms of the grant award, negotiating contracts, preparing reports, and making sure that the grant is administered according to funder guidelines, adheres to state and federal regulations, and meets any internal requirements of the organization.

1.6 What Is a Sponsored Program?

A sponsored program is any program or project within an organization that is funded by external sources. It can be a grant program, contract, or cooperative agreement “sponsored”

or funded by an outside organization. The term “sponsored programming” is most commonly used in higher education.

1.7 What Is Research Administration?

Research administration is the equivalent of grants administration. It refers to the range of management, administrative, and financial activities that occur both pre- and post-award and that are necessary to the oversight of sponsored programs. It is another term used primarily by institutions of higher education, as well as by hospitals and research facilities.

Staff people referred to as research administrators (who work in an office of research administration) provide technical assistance to the organization's principal investigators and proposal writers and carry out regulatory overseeing of programs. Their purpose is to ensure compliance with internal and external rules and regulations, thereby strengthening compliance awareness and promoting good stewardship of sponsored funding.

2. DETERMINING ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Now that you understand the terminology, you need to figure out where your organization fits in. The first thing your organization should do before embarking on the grants process is conduct a needs assessment. Call together your organization's administrative staff to discuss the future of the organization, determine how grants fit into the picture, and evaluate the organization's capacity to develop proposals and administer grant funds. Worksheet 1, the Organizational Capacity Questionnaire, will get you started.

WORKSHEET 1

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Type of organization:
 State government Public college or university
 Local government Private, nonprofit college or university
 Special district Nonprofit organization
 Indian tribe Private, profit-making organization
 Independent school district Other (Specify): _____
2. How many programs does your organization support?
 5 or fewer 16 to 50
 6 to 10 51 to 100
 11 to 15 Over 100
3. How many employees does your organization have?
 3 or fewer 15 to 50
 4 to 5 51 to 100
 6 to 14 Over 100
4. What is your annual budget?
 Less than \$150,000 \$500,000 to \$999,999
 \$150,000 to \$299,999 \$1,000,000 to \$4,999,999
 \$300,000 to \$499,999 \$5,000,000 or more
5. What percentage of the organization's total budget is currently comprised of grant funds?
 Less than 5% 21% to 35%
 5% to 10% 36% to 50%
 11% to 20% Over 50%
6. What percentage of the organization's total budget would you like to be comprised of grant funds?
 Less than 5% 21% to 35%
 5% to 10% 36% to 50%
 11% to 20% Over 50%
7. How many grants do you develop/write/submit in a single year?
 5 or fewer 16 to 50
 6 to 10 51 to 100
 11 to 15 Over 100

WORKSHEET 1 — CONTINUED

8. How many grants would you like to develop/write/submit in a single year?
____ 5 or fewer ____ 16 to 50
____ 6 to 10 ____ 51 to 100
____ 11 to 15 ____ Over 100
9. Is your organization primarily seeking grants for unrestricted operating expenses or grants to develop and/or support projects?
____ Operating grants ____ Project grants ____ Both
10. Approximately how many grants will be foundation or corporate grants?
____ 5 or fewer ____ 16 to 25
____ 6 to 10 ____ 26 to 50
____ 11 to 15 ____ Over 50
11. Approximately how many grants will be state or local government grants?
____ 5 or fewer ____ 16 to 25
____ 6 to 10 ____ 26 to 50
____ 11 to 15 ____ Over 50
12. Approximately how many grants will be federal government grants?
____ 5 or fewer ____ 16 to 25
____ 6 to 10 ____ 26 to 50
____ 11 to 15 ____ Over 50
13. Will grant writing be a responsibility shared by many employees or only a select few?
____ Many ____ Few How many? _____
14. If several employees will share the duty of writing grants, which department or employee will be responsible for coordinating these activities, including compliance issues?

15. If only one employee will possess the duty of writing grants, which department or employee will be responsible for coordinating these activities, including compliance issues?

16. Does the volume of grant proposals currently being generated or anticipated require the hiring of one or more staff dedicated to the organization's grants?
____ Yes ____ No If yes, how many? _____
17. If a dedicated staff person(s) for grants is hired, will this individual be solely responsible for developing and writing all of the organization's grant proposals, that is, will this person serve as the organization's grant writer?
____ Yes ____ No

WORKSHEET 1 — CONTINUED

18. Will the dedicated staff person be responsible for ensuring compliance of grant-funded projects?

Yes No

19. Will the dedicated staff person in cooperation with grant program staff be responsible for the financial management of awarded grant funds or will the organization's regular financial staff manage this task?

Dedicated grants staff Existing financial staff

Comments: _____

This questionnaire is a helpful tool for assessing your organization's capacity to competitively —

- pursue a moderate to high volume of grant funding, particularly federal grant funding, and
- administer awarded funds.

2.1 Completing the Questionnaire

The organization's CEO and/or governing body should complete Worksheet 1 with input from staff. If the CEO and the governing body complete the document separately, their responses

should be consistent. This indicates that all parties share a vision of the future of the organization. If the visions differ, you will need to address this before you start developing grant proposals — you might want to schedule some strategic planning sessions or at least meet to reach an agreement on the direction everyone sees the organization moving over the next few years.

The aim of this evaluation process is to ensure you establish the best organizational structure to meet your grant-funding goals, or to "ramp up" an organization that has a more relaxed approach to pursuing grants. The process should help everyone within the

organization distinguish his or her roles and responsibilities. Focus on the needs of the organization, current and future. (You may need to adapt the questions to your particular situation.)

2.2 Assessing the Data Collected

Your answers to the questions on Worksheet 1 can determine where you will look for funds or what you might be eligible for.

- *Question 1:* The type of organization is important because it determines what kind of grants you will be eligible to apply for. As you will see in Chapter 2, foundation grants are generally available only to nonprofit organizations, meaning those organizations that possess 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. Foundations also commonly award grants to public and private K-12 school districts, as well as public and private colleges and universities, even if they don't have a separate 501(c)(3) arm, because these institutions do not make a profit and they do serve the public good. State and local governments, special districts, and Indian tribal governments will not find many foundations willing to give them grant money. Instead, they will submit most of their grant applications to the federal government. Foundations will also not give to profit-making organizations.

All the organizations listed in Question 1 can pursue federal government grants. They may not be eligible to apply for every federal grant, but the federal government does offer a number of grant programs for each type of organization.

- *Question 2:* An organization that supports many programs will have more funding options than an organization that runs only a couple of programs.
- *Question 3:* The more employees your organization has, the more people could be developing and writing grant proposals. This, in turn, will require strict internal control of the grants process and centralized monitoring of grants submitted and grants awarded.
- *Questions 4 to 6:* Your organization's annual budget, and grant funds' current and potential impact on the organization's bottom line, will inform your decisions about the type and dollar amount of grants you apply for, what changes in personnel are necessary to reach or maintain your desired status, and what internal processes you need to implement to ensure the highest program integrity for grant funds received.
- *Questions 7 to 8:* These questions ask you to assess current and desired output, which should encourage you to reflect on how the organization's current capacity for handling grants will have to change to reach the desired output.
- *Questions 9 to 12:* These questions ask you to assess the organization's capacity for developing, writing, submitting, and administering a variety of grant types. Operating grants are in far shorter supply than project grants, so an organization primarily seeking operating grants will not be applying for nearly as many grants as an organization seeking project grants. It is also much less work to prepare an operating grant application.

Foundation and corporate grants not only require less information from applicants in terms of the actual proposal, but they also require much less monitoring once awarded.

State and local government grants vary widely in their application requirements as well as in the extent of monitoring; however, it is fair to say that organizations will not be able to take a relaxed approach to preparing state and local grant proposals for submission, nor to monitoring them once grant funds are awarded.

Federal grants require the most effort for preparing proposals and have the strictest guidelines for monitoring. Any organization that has three or more multiyear federal awards *must* designate a single staff person or create a centralized grants office to ensure that the organization is in full compliance with federal government program and financial rules and regulations.

- *Question 13:* The answer to this question will be informed by the answers to all the questions that came before it. Think about the number of programs your organization operates, the diversity of the programs, and the number and types of grants that your organization plans to write. Does it make more sense to have designated staff within each program area be responsible for developing and writing grants within

their area, or would the organization be better served by hiring a grant writer? Do current staff have the time to add substantial amounts of grant writing to their list of job duties? Would hiring one grant writer be adequate to handle the anticipated workload?

- *Questions 14 to 18:* If more than one individual or office is involved in writing grants within a single organization, who will serve as the single point of contact or centralized office to coordinate all of the organization's grants activities and ensure internal and external compliance, both before proposals are submitted and after proposals are funded?
- *Question 19:* The person who ensures compliance with grant rules and regulations may or may not also deal with the financial management of grant awards. Consider whether your organization's staff has the capacity to handle this duty. Many organizations will hire a grants accountant who deals solely with grant funds (Sample 3 in Chapter 3 includes a job description for a grants accountant). This person may be housed in either the centralized grants office or in the finance office of the organization. If your organization has been awarded three or more federal grants, particularly multiyear grants, I would strongly recommend that you hire a grants accountant.